



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



### Connecticut General Assembly Education Committee Public Hearing Testimony of Commissioner Charlene M. Russell-Tucker February 22, 2023

Good morning Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee. I am Charlene Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Education (Department). I am pleased to have an opportunity to provide you with testimony today regarding three bills which appear on your agenda.

#### **HB 6662, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Education**

The Governor's Education Implementer bill makes some technical changes and provides for level funding of the Charter School grant and the formula grants in order to implement the Governor's recommended budget. The department is supportive of the Governor's Recommend Budget and Budget implementer.

#### **HB 6663, An Act Establishing the English Learners' Bill of Rights**

The department is in strong support of the Governor's Bill, An Act Establishing the English Learners' Bill of Rights as this has been the work of the department for a number of years. The department will support the ongoing implementation. The department with the State Board of Education historically has been committed to empowering all English Learners and their families across the state. A cornerstone of the work of the agency has always been to ensure educational access and opportunity. To achieve this goal and meet the needs of English Learner/multilingual learners it is imperative that we build the systemic supports in this proposed bill at the local level. This will create a welcoming school community and engage families. If passed, it will require new and enhanced actions by the LEAs to support the implementation of the English Learners' Bill of Rights. We thank the Governor for introducing this piece of legislation.

#### **SB 1028, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Education**

We thank the Chairs of the Committee for raising this bill and will summarize its sections below.

**Sections 1 & 2** - fix several changes made to the Alliance District statute during the most recent legislative session that have unintended consequences for the department and the grantees. These sections allow for the automatic recalculation of Alliance Districts every 5 years and caps the number at 33. It also allows any district that has ever been identified as an Alliance District to keep that designation for the purposes of calculating their ECS grant and receiving Alliance District funds. Lastly, our proposal makes the look back period for calculating a district's Alliance District grant the same for the 3 newly identified districts as the previously identified districts. All Alliance Districts will now use FY 2012 as the base year for calculating their Alliance District grant.

**Section 3** - Outdated statutes from 2012 govern the requirements for educator evaluation and support. Since that time, new and innovative strategies to support the continuous improvement of educator

practice are emerging. Some of these strategies reflect best practices in the field of education, but do not align with what is currently in statute. This proposal makes various changes, including allowing the State Board of Education to revise, as necessary, the guidelines for a model teacher evaluation and support program and the model teacher evaluation and support program itself.

**Section 4** - continues the period that the reduced-isolation and residency enrollment requirements for interdistrict magnet schools will apply to such schools from June 30, 2023, to each fiscal year thereafter to remain consistent with the settlement agreement in the *Sheff v. O'Neill* case and the policy for enrollment requirements outside of the Sheff region. The proposal extends the period interdistrict magnet schools must meet residency and reduced-isolation standards set by the Commissioner of Education beyond the existing end period of July 1, 2023, to every school year thereafter. Lastly, the proposal extends the period that interdistrict magnet schools must meet residency and reduced-isolation standards set by the Commissioner of Education to qualify for the magnet operating grant beyond the existing end date of June 30, 2023, to every fiscal year thereafter.

**Section 5** - effectively terminates the application of an outdated magnet funding provision to June 30, 2023. The funding structure, which applied to a specific magnet school, no longer applies, and will not apply to any magnet school in the future.

**Section 6** – extends the prohibition starting next school year on local boards of education that operate interdistrict magnet schools in the *Sheff* region from charging tuition for students enrolled in the school programs, with the exception of Hartford Public Schools which may charge tuition for students attending Great Path Academy.

**Section 7** – authorizes the Commissioner of Education to develop enrollment standards for interdistrict magnet schools for purposes of enrollment requirements pursuant to 10-264l on or before July 1, 2017, and to develop an alternative reduced-isolation student enrollment percentage for an interdistrict magnet school located in the Sheff region on or before May 1, 2018, and as necessary thereafter. Section 7 should be further updated to authorize the Commissioner of Education to update the enrollment requirements, as necessary beyond the statutory July 1, 2017 date, to comply with the applicable stipulated agreements in the *Sheff v. O'Neill* case and legal considerations in the non-Sheff region as indicated in red text: “Not later than July 1, 2017, the Commissioner of Education shall develop, **and may revise as necessary thereafter**, reduced-isolation [setting] enrollment standards for interdistrict magnet school programs that shall serve as the enrollment requirements for purposes of section 10-264l, as amended by this act.”

**Section 8** – authorizes the Commissioner of Education to make grant payments, with funds appropriated for Sheff settlement, for academic and social student support for programs at magnet schools, the Open Choice districts, Interdistrict Cooperative programs, and technical high schools that assist the state in meetings its obligation pursuant to the decision in *Sheff v. O'Neill*, 238 Conn. 1 (1996) or any related stipulation or order in effect.

**Section 9** - fixes a scrivener’s error in a section of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children which controls the scope of coverage for National Guard and Reserve members on active duty. Since sections 1209 and 1211 do not relate to the National Guard and Reserves active duty status, the provision renders the group of students who were intended to be eligible for coverage effectively not covered by the Compact. This language fixes that error.